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DEAF-BLIND GIRL CONQUERS
HANDICAPS

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Deaf-Blind Girl Conquers Handicaps

More than fifteen years ago, a little girl in Essex County contracted spinal meningitis which left her both deaf and blind at the age of two and one-half years. Referred to the State Commission for the Blind by a social worker of the Essex County Isolation Hospital, she constituted a compelling challenge to the personnel of the Commission.

The girl is now a young lady of eighteen. She is still blind and deaf, but she

students who were both blind and deaf. In 1946, fourteen such students were being taught there.

The 1930 census showed 1,942 persons who were both blind and deaf but it is believed that the great majority of these were aged persons. It is not known just how many persons there are in the United States who were born blind and deaf or who became so at an early age.

Teaching Techniques

The years of training which were to enrich Carmela's life were continued at this institution from the point where her first teacher had been able to guide her. The initial approach at Perkins is the teaching of commands. Fingers of one hand of the deaf-blind student are placed on the outside of the teacher's throat where the movement of the larynx in speaking can be detected and the thumb is placed on the teacher's lips. The teacher will give a command such as "Sit!" After the student has felt the movement of the lips and the vibration of the voice box, the teacher gently forces her to sit down upon a chair. This process is repeated again and again until the student has caught the relationship between the particular lip movement felt by her hand and her action in sitting down. As soon as one such command has been learned, another is taught. The same association technique is employed in teaching the names of objects, such as a ball, a chair, etc., with the student touching the object each time that the teacher's lips form the word for it. At the end of her first year at Perkins Institute, Carmela knew

thirty-nine commands and forty-one objects. By the end of her second year, her vocabulary was so great that no further effort was made to keep an accurate record of the number of words and commands which she knew. Verbs constitute one of the more difficult groups of words to teach. The meaning of "jump" is finally conveyed, for example, by lifting the child bodily again and again after she has felt with her hand the lip movement for the word. In a series of trial and error reactions to ascertain what is meant, ultimately the child will try to jump by herself. The favorable response of her teacher conveys to the child that she has discovered the right action for the word. The process is slow and requires remarkable patience on the part of both teacher and pupil, but it is eventually productive.

As her age and capacity permitted, Carmela learned the use of Braille characters and this knowledge opened to her the world of books. At the age of twelve, she had attained an academic level equivalent to the third grade, tremendous progress for anyone with her double handicap.

Interests Broaden

In the six years which have elapsed since her twelfth birthday, Carmela has developed more markedly in her social adjustments. In her earlier years, the child was reserved and did not initiate conversations even after she had progressed to the point where she had sufficient command of the language to do so. With the advent of the teen age, however, she became more evidently extro-



At an early age, Carmela enjoyed dolls

finds life interesting and satisfying because she can talk, she can understand others when they talk, she can read and write in Braille, she swims, and she is more than passably accomplished in knitting, crocheting, hand sewing, machine sewing, and leather work. She enters so constructively into the activities of her own home that the principal concern of her parents is that she is trying to do too much. Her name is Carmela Otero.

With great perseverance and infinite patience on the part of a teacher assigned by the Commission for the Blind, the child learned to dress herself and to feed herself. At the age of six, the Commission financed her admission to the Perkins Institute at Watertown, Massachusetts where she is still being educated.

The Perkins Institute and the Massachusetts School for the Blind has been in existence for 115 years. While the Institute has some private endowment, it also receives some support from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and from fees paid by those who send their clients there. The Institute has taught many blind and deaf persons, Helen Keller among them. Miss Keller's teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy, was a teacher at Perkins. In 1945, Perkins had eleven



Miss Otero and a friend enjoy a story in Braille

cept it. Another agency reports that a mother who could not find quarters had to send one child to live with a grandmother in Maine, and another child was placed in a foster home a great distance from his mother. The agency writes, "We don't know how much this mother wants or rejects her children and cannot test it out well because there is validity to her claim that she cannot find suitable quarters."

The housing shortage is not new. A hundred years ago, Dr. Charles Booth made a study in London which showed that there was a positive correlation among poverty, poor health, and poor housing. Twenty-five years ago, *Better Times*, published in New York City, wrote as follows with reference to certain parts of New York City: "This is a block comprising thirty-seven tenement houses, a garage, and a cigar factory . . . Not to dwell upon the absence of dumb-waiters, steam heat or hot water, necessitating the carrying up and downstairs of provisions, coal, ashes, and the like, it is to be noted that one-half of the families have no modern conveniences beyond a kitchen sink . . . Almost all the toilets are in the hall, one for two families." One of the nineteen agencies referred to above tells of a veteran who, with his wife and twenty-one month old baby, is living in one room in a rooming house. They share the bath with thirteen other persons. Twenty-five years ago, a publication pointed up the inadequacy of a situation in which one toilet was shared by two families. Today one bathroom is shared by sixteen persons.

Those of us who see these things and try to do something about them ask ourselves, "What is happening to families?" and the answers are there before us. They double up, they triple up, they quadruple up. They split up and often stay split up. They buy houses and pay too much. They pay too much for shelter in hotels. They go down the ladder into poorer and poorer housing.

On the basis of the evidence, this is what is happening in New Jersey: Our housing situation is breaking down standards of living. Our housing situation is demoralizing individuals. Our housing situation is developing tensions—acute anxiety, desperation, anger—and, too often, disintegration and its vicious byproducts.

The housing situation is also affecting the welfare agency. In many cases, agencies can not take on new staff because the prospective employees can not find a place in the community in which to live. It also affects our standards and our sense of values. We are tending to

accept the inadequate and substandard shelter because it is so often the only alternate to the street. We know that many families are living in shelter that has no heating facilities, no potable water supply, and no plumbing arrangements, shelter that is a fire trap. In the past, we would have pushed the Board of Health to action; we would have encouraged and helped the family to move. Today we compromise; we don't tell the Board of Health; we hope the family can stay put; and we create conflict within ourselves.

Sometimes in these emergency situations, we place children in foster homes. Are we right to make placement for "real estate reasons." One children's agency reports that seventy-five per cent of its recent foster home requests relate directly to lack of housing.

We are losing foster homes, because foster parents have housing problems, too. We have had to modify our requirements for foster homes, but we are not happy about the necessity.

We are supposed to be doing something about anti-social behavior. Aren't we being frustrated by poor housing? Isn't the real job we're doing being sabotaged?

The housing crisis imposes additional financial problems upon us as agencies. We are paying higher rents to keep families from eviction. We have to subsidize separated families directly or indirectly through foster home placements. Are these constructive uses of public monies or of community chest funds?

On a case by case, client by client basis, we are by and large doing a job of which we, as agencies and agency personnel, can be proud. We are sharing and understanding our clients' terrible anxiety. We are doing the best we know how, by any way we can find, with the means we have to work with. We do whatever we can in each individual case to hold together "the fragile fabric of family life." We bring the problem again and again to our boards, our planning councils, and our city fathers. And we know that these things are not enough. We know that the problem will have to be attacked on a broader front and with more effective weapons than we as local agencies can provide. What are you doing about it?

About sixty-eight per cent of the population of Nevada was born outside the State. About sixty-five per cent of the persons living in California were born outside California. About forty-four per cent of the persons living in New Jersey were not born in New Jersey.

Soldiers' Home Staff Consulted on GI Benefits

Staff members of the Home for Disabled Soldiers at Menlo Park have been asked to advise on the G.I. Bill of Rights, not only by residents in the institution, but by veterans in nearby communities, according to the institution's annual report. With the cooperation of veterans' organizations, and the Veterans' Administration, the staff has been able to give appropriate advice or to advise where authoritative advice could be secured.

Of the seventy-four men in the institution, two-thirds are veterans of World War I, fifteen are veterans of the Spanish-American War, one is a veteran of World War II, and the remainder are men in the regular service. Ten World War II veterans were admitted during the year for treatment. All except one were discharged.

Builders Are Hesitant to Bid on Public Jobs

"Few bidders care to give competitive bids on public work," according to Charles N. Leathem, director of the Division of Architecture and Construction.

In his annual report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1946, Mr. Leathem stated that "costs of building have gone up by leaps and bounds so that bidding on construction is looked upon as a gigantic gamble."

"Contracts for some operations were not entered into because money available was inadequate to provide proper facilities, and materials were scarce and almost impossible to secure."

In addition to numerous surveys, building plans, estimates of insurance claims, and renovations for the Department, the Division performed services for other departments and public agencies. It measured and made plans and sketches of buildings upon request for the Department of Economic Development, Motor Vehicle Department, and the State Purchasing Commission. Upon request, it inspected the Odd Fellows Home in Trenton, the Sussex County Jail in Newton, and Swiney Sanatorium in Bayonne for fire hazards. Consultative services were extended to the Cumberland County Hospital for the Insane, the Agricultural Experiment Station at New Brunswick, and to the State Teachers College in Trenton.

vert in her personality. Possessed of assurance socially, she enjoys talking to other persons. She travels with her teacher and enjoys the experience. Although she apparently enjoys being with others, solitude does not bore her. She likes to read and has manifested a somewhat unusual interest in geography. She can sense the rhythm of music by placing her hand on a piano which is being played.

Miss Otero has a rather remarkable memory. In 1942, at the age of fourteen, she told a visiting teacher that she had known her when she, Carmela, was five years old. The teacher concurred but asked her how she could be sure. Carmela replied that the teacher had a ring of unusual shape which she had touched as a little girl of five. The teacher still wore the ring nine years later, and the child immediately associated the ring with her early teacher.

Swims and Dives

The school year at Perkins Institute lasts for nine months and each summer Carmela has returned to New Jersey to be with her parents and to spend a month at the summer camp at High Point Park maintained by the Commission for the Blind. She has learned to swim, a sport in which she indulges with zest and eagerness. This summer she learned the back stroke. She has also done a little diving in the last two years.

At the Institute, Carmela has learned to sew by hand and with a machine. She knits, crochets, weaves, and does various kinds of leather work. While at home during the summer recess, she makes the beds, helps to clean, and likes to try her hand at cooking. Her parents are gratified at what has been done for her and what she has been able to do for herself, but they have expressed concern that she may be trying to do too much. Perhaps in another year, Carmela will come home to live and the teacher has cautioned the parents against being overly protective, because their daughter enjoys the greatest amount of independence and self-reliance of which she is capable.

If you were to meet Carmela Otero today, you would meet an alert and socially assured young lady of eighteen who is a little over five feet tall and who weighs about 110 pounds. You would be able to understand her when she talks and she would be able to understand you by following the articulation of your lips with the touch of her fingers. And you probably would marvel, as others have marveled, at what can be accomplished, despite tre-

mendous adversity, with patience, kindness, and perseverance. Because Carmela Otero is a credit to herself, to her

family, to her several teachers, to her school, and to the Commission for the Blind.

Welfare Council Seeks Agency to Publicize Chronic Ill Needs

A central agency at the State level "to gather and disseminate information regarding the nature and extent" of chronic illness in New Jersey was urged by the New Jersey Welfare Council in a resolution approved at its annual meeting in Asbury Park last November. The proposal was recommended to the consideration of the State commission studying care of the chronically ill and other welfare problems. The language of the resolution stated that the proposed agency should be in addition to such other immediate and definite corrective action as might be found necessary to care for the chronically ill. It was also recommended that the agency be financed by other than public funds. The agency would be a statistical and research bureau and would also give consideration to "the preventive aspects of long term illness." Similar agencies in other sections of the country have been effective in collecting and disseminating specific information about the scope of the chronically ill problem and developing public consciousness of the needs.

Sickness Benefits

The Council also expressed its interest in "having the State take advantage of the Federal Social Security Act amendment and provide a system of sickness benefits to supplement the existing unemployment compensation program."

The Council endorsed the Wagner-Ellender-Taft housing bill which is expected to be reintroduced in the next Congress, and it also endorsed the principle of compulsory health insurance.

The Council also went on record as favoring United States support of international action looking toward relief of distressed areas of the world in which food production was inadequate to meet the need.

Another resolution approved by the Council directed the organization's board of directors to appoint a special committee which "should be charged with the responsibility of making a thorough study of workmen's compensation in New Jersey with a view toward presenting legislative recommendations to the board if the results of such study should warrant such action." The reso-

lution pointed out that the New Jersey Compensation Law covers only thirteen diseases at the present time. Composition of the committee is to include representatives of "industry, labor, the medical, dental, nursing, and legal professions, and the general public."

Continued study of personnel practices was urged in another resolution approved by the Council membership. The Council's Committee on Agency Personnel Standards is to gather additional material on personnel practices in public and private social agencies in New Jersey and make such material available to local councils. The objective is establishment of more adequate and more uniform standards.

Views on Child Guidance Debated at Asbury Park

"Institutionalization of the juvenile offender only aggravates the original grounds for delinquency."

This point of view was advanced by Dr. Simon Doniger, executive director of the Jewish Child Guidance Bureau of Newark, in one of the group symposiums on juvenile offenders held at the annual conference of the New Jersey Welfare Council in Asbury Park in November.

Dr. Doniger's views were at variance with those of Dr. S. R. Slavson, director of group therapy of the Jewish Board of Guardians of New York, and president of the American Group Therapy Association. Dr. Slavson contended that many delinquent acts are committed by persons with psychopathic personalities who can only be treated satisfactorily in an institution. He contended that commitment must often be resorted to for the protection of both the individual and society.

Dr. Doniger asserted that poverty, slums, and broken homes are not the only causes of juvenile delinquency. He pointed out that "frustrated mothers of broken homes react poorly and they in turn influence the maladjustment of their children." He said that probably all anti-social behavior is a defense mechanism for the offender.

LEGAL NOTES

Five Pension Plans Open to Employees

By Eugene T. Urbaniak

Assistant Deputy Attorney General

There are five pension procedures available to employees of the Department of Institutions and Agencies, the largest being the Employees' Retirement System of the State of New Jersey, commonly called the Employees' Retirement System.

This System requires that the member make semi-monthly payments into the Fund based upon his age and rate of pay. There are two classes of membership designated as Class A and Class B, the latter providing for a slightly higher pension and requiring increased payments semi-monthly. The pension available to any employee under this System depends upon the number of years service, age attained, and salary received at time of retirement.

If he is in Class A, a person who retires at the age of seventy years will receive a pension equivalent to 1/70th of his average salary multiplied by the number of years of his service. Half of this amount will represent annuity from his own contributions; the other half will be from monies made available by the State. The average used is the average yearly salary for the last five years, except that it may not exceed \$7,200.

A person who is in Class B is entitled to pay at the rate of 1/60th of his average salary multiplied by the number of years of service. This consists of an annuity based on contributions into the Fund of 1/120th of his annual compensation and a pension based on 1/120th of his annual income.

In addition to the pension features, the System also has an accidental disability retirement allowance of two-thirds of final compensation plus an annuity which is the actuarial equivalent of accumulated deductions. Such disability must arise from an accident out of and during the course of employment.

There is a further provision for an ordinary disability retirement which consists of an annuity which is the actuarial equivalent of accumulated deductions plus a pension of one-fifth of the

final compensation. Eligibility for ordinary disability retirement requires service of at least ten years but this provision is not necessary for accidental disability retirement.

In the event of accidental death, certain dependents are eligible to receive payments totaling one-half of the final compensation of the employee. If the dependents enumerated in the act are not in existence, then a cash sum equal in amount to the final compensation of the deceased for the last year of his employment shall be paid to his estate or to the person designated by the employee in his retirement forms.

It is now mandatory that all employees become enrolled in the Employees' Retirement System with the exception of veterans, who are not required to so enroll, and if they are members may at any time withdraw their accumulated deductions and elect to retire under the provisions of the Veterans' Pension Law.

There are available to the employee or to his widow certain options which normally appear in the usual insurance contracts covering annuities and these are designed to fit the requirements of the individual cases.

Board of Trustees

The fund is administered by a board of trustees consisting of two appointed by the Governor, the State Treasurer, three elected from among the member employees of the State, and one elected from among the member employees of the counties and municipalities. The trustees serve without compensation but are allowed reimbursement of actual expenses in the performance of official duties.

In the event that a non-member desires to enroll in the System he may do so by making payment of all deductions which would normally have been paid from his salary either in bulk payment or by semi-monthly payments over an extended period of time.

The maximum pension available under the act is based upon a "ceiling" salary of \$7200 per annum. Accordingly, any employee receiving a sum in excess of this amount shall pay deductions only on the "ceiling" salary and be eligible for retirement on a basis of such salary.

Coincident with the enactment of the Employees' Retirement Pension Law in 1921, another pension law, known as the Heath Act, was passed. This was designed to cover employees in the State service as of January 1, 1921, and who did not desire to enroll in the Retirement System.

The Heath Act provides that a person employed prior to January 1, 1921, with a period of service of twenty-five years and having attained age sixty may retire by reason of physical disability which incapacitates him for service with the State.

Pension under the Heath Act consists of one-half of the final annual compensation of the employee and is paid from the General State Fund upon proof of eligibility requirements.

The remaining pension systems available to employees of the Department of Institutions and Agencies are the Prison Officers' Pension Fund, the Penal Officers' Pension Act, and the general provisions relating to the retirement of veterans, all of which will be discussed in an ensuing article in this publication.

Unemployment Payments Increased in October

Benefit payments paid by the State Unemployment Compensation Commission increased from 177,641 in September to 191,217 in October. The increase in October payments followed an increase in claims filed in September. Compensable claims also increased eighteen per cent between September and October, and benefits disbursed increased eight per cent.

A steady downward trend in servicemen's readjustment allowances processed by the Commission was reported. First claims dropped off twenty-seven per cent and payments declined almost nineteen per cent. In September, 80,275 veterans applied for readjustment allowances. In October, the number was 59,574. The sum of \$5,236,732 was paid out in servicemen's readjustment allowances in October.

The North Jersey Training School at Totowa for training mentally deficient girls opened in 1928.

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